

▶ London Councils response

▶ London Assembly Investigation – bus services

London Councils represents London's 32 borough councils and the City of London. It is a cross-party organisation that works on behalf of all of its member authorities regardless of political persuasion.

Introduction

London Councils is pleased to respond to the London Assembly Investigation into bus services. We know that bus provision is a matter of concern for boroughs, and that buses are the most agile form of public transport, that should in theory be able to be deployed with relative ease to support new development and new centres of economic growth.

General questions

1. Is London's bus network fit for purpose?

London's bus network provides a vital service for millions of Londoners every day. Our travel affordability research, commissioned with London TravelWatch and Trust for London, means we know how important the bus network is for lower income Londoners, and given its accessibility compared with rail and tube modes, its importance for elderly and disabled Londoners in getting around their city.

That said, boroughs want to see more orbital routes linking key areas of economic activity, and more express routes. Reducing pressure on radial routes (bus, rail or tube) into central London should be a priority of the bus network, especially in outer London. Bus-led development is also an underdeveloped concept that should be a much stronger priority for TfL. We acknowledge that new bus routes need to be located where they will achieve high patronage. However they are seen as imperative to support sustainable growth in regeneration areas and some boroughs feel the barriers are too high at present for the introduction of new bus routes. We suggest that TfL undertakes trialling of new routes more readily to understand the demand in an area, before it commits to new routes.

2. How does the bus system compare in inner and outer London?

3. What different challenges do the inner and outer networks face?

London is well served by buses, but it serves different purposes in different areas. In Outer London, not everyone wants to travel into central London, with demand for travel to different town centres crossing borough boundaries. Many people in outer London (more so than inner London) choose buses to save costs on public transport and to access the rail and underground network. This reflects the growing trend of people being 'priced out' of central and inner London. Routes in outer London may have lower demand due to lower densities of population. However, when this is found to be the case, early and honest engagement with the borough will be appreciated to find a mutually agreeable way forward.

Traffic congestion, overcrowding and demand are challenges common to all parts of the networks, and are more complex than an inner/outer split. However, according to TfL figures, bus patronage has been reducing in central London and one of the suggested reasons is a significant increase in congestion, which has a negative impact on the actual time it takes to travel between points on the road network. Bus routes through any town centre or congested area will experience delays, whether in inner or outer London. Buses in outer London can be the only

form of public transport available to people, depending on proximity to train, underground or tram services, whereas there is greater competition from the tube and rail services in inner and central London.

It is fair to say that due to the radial nature of the bus network into central London; central London has a higher number of routes going through it compared to inner and outer London, in some cases contributing to the congestion experienced. Given the recent consultation on bus provision in central London, TfL is aware of this and looking to reduce the sheer numbers travelling through Oxford Street and others.

We are aware of the challenges TfL bus network planning faces regarding driver facilities at end of bus routes and believe that these are more pronounced in outer London areas; sometimes requiring facilities to be put in place. Given the availability of kerb space throughout London, this puts an additional pressure on this sought after resource.

Designing the bus network

4. How well do TfL currently plan bus routes?

London Councils has recently responded to the West End and Oxford Street consultation on changes to the bus network in Oxford Street which has implications for the wider connectivity of some routes in London. In that response, we express our concerns that TfL has not sought to undertake a holistic review of the bus network in that area. We expected the review to take into account air quality impacts and displacement; opportunities to better serve new development, Housing Zones, Intensification Areas and Opportunity Areas; consideration of the Clean Bus Zones; and the impacts on lower income, elderly and vulnerable Londoners. We have not been convinced that any of these factors have been taken into account. Although London's bus network is generally regarded as the best in the country, improvements to TfL's planning processes are required. That central London review was an opportunity to undertake a holistic approach and this opportunity has been missed.

More widely, our response to the London Assembly Transport Committee when it previously investigated this issue in 2013 indicated that boroughs felt consultation on bus routes was too focused on very minor changes proposed and insufficiently integrated or corridor focused. Our experiences of the West End review and the review of buses serving hospitals indicate that this continues to be the case. We called in 2013 for TfL to undertake area-based travel planning, looking at all modes in an area, and ensuring as much alignment as possible, including signage and co-location. Bus integration with other modes (and vice-versa) continues to be a problem.

5. Does TfL take account of the London Plan and housing developments when planning bus routes? Could they improve the way they make these decisions?

Boroughs continue to feel that TfL could do more to support new housing developments, major local economic development sites, and new expanding schools. Given the lead-in times for new major infrastructure such as new rail and tube lines, bus routes ought to be able to be introduced with relative ease. Boroughs tell us this is not the case in practice, as the barriers to introduction and the costs involved are too high. Anecdotally boroughs tell us that section 106 or other funding from new developments is required together with indications of high demand before TfL will consider new routes or rerouting existing ones. We have concerns that as TfL does not plan to extend the mileage of the bus network in its new five year Business Plan, this will continue to be the case.

We want it to be much easier for boroughs to work with TfL from the onset of new developments, to assess the potential transport links that could be introduced. We want to see much greater transparency in decision-making about new routes – we acknowledge that not all new routes will be viable, but this process should be open and honest with boroughs. We note the example of Kilnwood Vale, an extension to Crawley which has been built on the principles of sustainable travel and reducing car use. The development has secured not only the diversion of two bus routes into the development, but is offering homebuyers £100 travel voucher which can be used towards the purchase of a bicycle or bus or rail season ticket. We want to see an increase in public transport-led development in London.

6. What bus priority measures has TfL already introduced and how successful are they?

Boroughs are best placed to answer this question. We support bus priority measures and TfL's efforts to ensure bus reliability. We agree that bus patronage will only increase when bus reliability improves.

7. What impact could the introduction and development of the hopper ticket have on the design of London's bus network?

We support the introduction of the Hopper ticket because it presents a real opportunity for financial savings for some of London's poorest citizens. It may also encourage greater bus use as people can go further for less, and makes the bus network more competitive in terms of journeys and cost compared to the tube.

There are clear possibilities for the Hopper fare to be used in situations where routes are too long to be run reliably. However, before the Hopper fare is used as a reason to truncate routes earlier than previously run, TfL needs to understand how many passengers are already on their second bus journey, the first journey of which may have taken close to or over an hour already, to ensure that passengers are not financially penalised. Even unlimited journeys within one hour using the Hopper fare cannot address this, and the Mayor may wish to consider extending the one hour time period, particularly for journeys originating in outer London.

8. Does TfL plan new bus services to stimulate demand or just to respond to existing demand?

We think TfL is too focused on responding to demand, and there are untapped opportunities for stimulating demand. Bus-led development, express bus routes and orbital routes are all examples of this.

TfL's messaging seems biased toward existing users rather than encouraging new users. TfL could give more thought into how new users could be encouraged to use the bus network and universities are well placed to help with this.

9. What tools does TfL have to monitor and forecast demand?

We understand TfL uses data from Oyster card touch ins as well as regular bus passenger surveys to understand bus demand, and that they are starting to use potential 'return' trips to understand where people alight from buses. We want to see TfL alive to the planning system and calculating demand based on new schools, hospitals, housing and business developments.

Alternative models and approaches**10. What other approaches to network design should TfL be considering?**

Orbital routes and through routes – we strongly support new orbital routes, and consider there to be particular value in these being express or 'through' services. Journeys to neighbouring towns and centres should be made easier and provide a viable alternative to train or tube routes (which may equally not be orbital).

Bus rapid transit systems – London already has elements of this and we support efforts by TfL and boroughs to improve bus reliability through bus priority measures. There is more that can be done to improve bus reliability, but we acknowledge that TfL and boroughs work within the confines of an existing road network that is congested and not designed for the levels of traffic seen today; and that other modes including walking and cycling need to be taken into account.

Shuttles and hubs – we are cautious that TfL completely adopt such a model. Whilst there are plenty of people who wish to get to a train station, not everyone does. In practice, buses already 'hub' around town centres. The boundary of inner and outer London could have a series of hubs and shuttle buses bringing people into central London. Such a model could make use of the Hopper fare, or connections with tube stations, but this assumes everyone wants to get into central London. Shuttle buses may still be affected by road congestion.

11. Is it a good idea for TfL to consider different types of network for different areas of London? How could this work in practice?

We would support this approach and would encourage a more holistic, all modes approach to network planning. We acknowledge that the nature of buses means that they are not restricted to borough boundaries, and so

network planning may need to be considered from a sub-regional perspective. A particular approach could be to consider smaller buses on local roads to allow greater penetration of residential areas connecting with local town centres and transport interchanges for longer journeys.

12. How successful have existing express routes been, such as X26 and 607?

London Councils thinks there is more scope for an increase in express buses, and an increase in frequencies to the existing express buses. Anecdotal evidence suggests that certainly the X26 was very well regarded and used but is suffering currently due to increased congestion. Bus priority measures are therefore very important for this type of route.

Making changes to the network

14. What are the challenges associated with this kind of large-scale change to the bus system?

Communication with the public will present significant challenges, especially when there are major changes to the route a bus travels. Continued communication, giving clear timescales of the changes is particularly important as well as providing help to people to find an alternative journey, especially as not everyone in London is confident using a smartphone. TfL have previously suggested that incremental changes work better for the public, which we accept. However, this should not stop TfL to plan on a network basis and then proceed with implementing the findings gradually.

Bus operators will need to be involved closely during any proposals to ensure that not only are they comfortable with implementing them but also have ample time to train their drivers. Planning on a network-wide and integrated basis would require a significant, cultural shift to planning bus services. Changing the culture of any organisation has considerable challenges attached to it, requiring much staff engagement and training.

15. Could TfL improve the way it consults the public on proposed changes to bus routes? How?

We have been underwhelmed by the poor presentation of the information provided on the West End bus consultation. For example, the webpages giving information on the changes divided the routes up in a different way to the consultation document; and the consultation document had additional information and in some cases justification to was not provided on the webpages. Additionally a summary document, clearly outlining the changes in a user friendly way could have supported the understanding of the otherwise quite complex consultation documents.

An Equality Impact Assessment may help TfL officers to ascertain whether there are certain groups they should make particular effort to consult with, especially given the number of passengers that could be classed as vulnerable, given buses are the most accessible form of public transport.

Boroughs would like greater opportunity to input into bus tenders and route and service alterations. They know their local areas and want to be able to contribute to these specifications. At present we understand long-term timetables are given to boroughs, but they need more specific dates to ensure they can consult residents in a timely way.

As such we believe TfL should improve the way it consults; albeit that if the proposals are not particularly substantial changes, then we do not feel the public is likely to be particularly interested.

General questions

1. What should TfL's priorities be for delivering a safe bus network?

TfL's priorities need to encompass all of the below:

- Safe, reliable, modern bus fleet;

- Good driver awareness and training and safety matters on board and externally, including other road users and behaviours, for example the dangers people place themselves in when running for a bus;
- The safety of passengers on board the bus;
- The wider Vision Zero road safety vision, and the role that buses play in that;
- Consideration of wider safety matters including health impacts of buses running their engines.

2. Are you aware of any particular accident blackspots?

This is a question better answered by boroughs. We note that often TfL requires evidence of a collision or accident before a site can be considered for improvement work. We know that boroughs often consider this to be inadequate as many 'near misses' may occur at a site.

3. What are the particular safety concerns for:

Passengers on buses – movement on board buses whilst the bus is moving, including getting to a seat after boarding and standing up to move towards the exit on approaching a stop; when passengers have to stand, staying upright, especially on corners; unsecured wheelchairs and pushchairs and luggage/bags; the gap between buses and the pavement when boarding and alighting, especially for elderly people or people with limited mobility; the behaviour of other passengers; driver distraction.

Other road users – pedestrians crossing roads in front of buses approaching at speed; pedestrians on pavements as buses turn corners; cyclists and motorcyclists who could get trapped between buses and corners, edges of roads or railings; overcrowding at bus stops in peak periods, especially in town centres and at schools

Operators and drivers

4. How are operators and drivers incentivised to prioritise safety?

5. Should operators face contractual financial penalties for poor safety records?

6. Are drivers provided with adequate 'driving skills' training?

7. How effective is this training (which is delivered by individual operators)?

8. Should there be a 'London standard' for driving skills training (which would likely result in TfL managing the training)?

9. How are incidents managed by TfL and by the operators? What kind of support is available to those involved in bus collisions and incidents?

London Councils does not have enough knowledge on the incentives on safety to comment on these questions. As a general principle, any incentives on reliability should always be balanced by incentives for safety.

Technology

10. Has TfL taken advantage of new technologies to make buses safer?

11. What other technology advances should TfL consider piloting?

We consider that TfL should consider whether the technology used on lorries to create an audible warning when indicating left or right could also be rolled out to buses. We note that TfL has not adopted electronic destination blinds at the front of buses. Electronic blinds can give much more information to passengers waiting about immediate stops.

Infrastructure and design

12. Are there any problems caused by bus and cycling infrastructure sharing road space (particularly kerb side) and how could these be resolved?

When cyclists and buses share bus lanes, there are inevitable problems when buses pull in, as cyclists often have to move into oncoming traffic or into another lane to get past safely.

Other problems occur at junctions when there is insufficient room for cyclists to get past a bus to wait in the cycle box in advance of the other traffic without undertaking a dangerous manoeuvre.

Buses can also block walking and cycling crossings where multiple bus stops mean a bus cannot pull forward into a bus stop. Buses that then pull forward even when cyclists and pedestrians have the right to cross, can become dangerous manoeuvres.

Despite these concerns, we feel it is safer for cyclists to have access to bus lanes when alternative segregated infrastructure is not feasible, than for cyclists to have to use the regular road space.

13. Would expanding 20mph zones be a good way of reducing collisions?

It is a local decision about whether 20 mph zones are right for individual boroughs and locations. We want to see the police support boroughs through enforcement of 20 mph zones. Collisions are more complex than only involving speed, although we note that slower moving vehicles in theory have longer time to react and more time to be aware of other road users and cause less damage if collisions occur. Removing opportunities for conflict, including poorly designed junctions and cycle routes, and consideration of the sighting of loading bays, car parking spaces and bus stops are also part of what is needed to reduce collisions. Greater education of both drivers and cyclists, and the associated behaviour change and legal requirements is also needed, in a similar way to that with lorry drivers and lorry safety training for cyclists.

14. Would further investment in bus priority measures like bus lanes be a good way of reducing bus collisions?

Bus lanes in themselves do not remove conflict with cyclists, if cyclists can use bus lanes. However, in general the provision of bus lanes can reduce conflicts with other road users and should be supported as well as assisting bus service reliability and speed.